RESUME OF SERVICE CAREER

of

ORVIL CRANFILL METHENY, Brigadier General

DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH: 7 February 1927, Amarillo, Texas

YEARS OF ACTIVE COMMISSIONED SERVICE: Over 25 years

DATE OF RETIREMENT: 1 August 1976

MILITARY SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

The Transportation School, Basic and Advanced Courses
The Infantry School, Advanced Course
The Command and General Staff College
The National War College

EDUCATIONAL DEGREES:

University of Washington - BS Degree - Education
University of Pennsylvania - MBA Degree - Economics

CHRONOLOGICAL RECORD OF DUTY ASSIGNMENTS (Last 10 Years)

FROM	TO	ASSIGNMENTS
Jun 66	May 68	Economist, Pers Div, DSCPER, DA
May 68	Jul 69	Commander, 6th TC Bn (Trk), USARV
Jul 69	Aug 70	Chief, Negotiations Div, MTMC
Aug 70	Jun 71	Student, National War College
Jun 71	Nov 71	Commander, 124th Trans Cmd, USARV
Nov 71	Jun *72*	Commander, 5th Trans Cmd, USARV
Nov *72*	Jul 73	J-4, USPACOM
Aug 73	Jul 76	CG, Western MTMC

PROMOTIONS	DATES OF APPOINTMENT

2 LT	11 Jun 49
lLT	21 Aug 51
CPT	17 Aug 54
MAJ	26 Dec 61
LTC	18 Feb 66
COL	3 Feb 71
BG	1 Mar 73

US DECORATIONS AND BADGES

Legion of Merit W/4 Oak Leaf Clusters

Bronze Star Medal w/Oak Leaf Cluster

Meritorious Service Medal

SOURCE OF COMMISSION ROTC (Univ of Wash)

INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

Interview with BG (Ret) Orvil C. Metheny

BG Metheny was interviewed by CPT Louis C. Johnson on 22 November 1985. BG Metheny received his commission in 1949 through the University of Washington's ROTC program after a previous 18 month enlisted service tour.

BG Metheny reflects in this interview his experiences as the Commander of the 6th Transportation Battalion (TRK) in Long Binh, Vietnam from July 1968 to June 1969. He discusses convoy operations in response to frequent Viet Cong ambushes; junior officer leadership; personnel shortages; his battalion's high operational readiness; the transition from the M-14 to the M-16; and his personal view on personal cleanliness. As a closing note, the General describes the outstanding contribution of the enlisted men in Vietnam and lastly points out the unrealistic TRADOC task on Transportation Corps Commanders to perform their mission and conduct training simultaneously.

INTERVIEW

This is the Amy Transportation Oral History Interview conducted with BG Orvil C. Metheny on 22 November 1985 by CPT Louis C. Johnson in Danville, California where **BG Metheny** currently resides. **BG Metheny**'s military career spans a period from 1946 to 1976, with his last duty assignment being that of Commander of the Western Area, Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC).

CPT Johnson: It might interest you to know that probably by this December, MG Fred E. Elam, the Commander and Chief of Transportation will announce that Fort Eustis will become the regimental home of the Transportation Corps. The regimental system will give us an identity with a particular regiment, one that we can always expect to be assigned to and develop traditions. We in the Transportation Corps are excited about the regimental activation. There are a couple of questions about your background that I would like to ask you before we get into the immediate questions. What made you decide on a military career, sir?

BG Metheny: The Korean War. I was a happy college student when the Korean War came along. The reserve call-ups occurred and I came on active duty in February of 1951. 1 found myself in Korea about eight months later. I enjoyed my job in a truck

company in Korea. After I had accumulated sufficient points to rotate back to Japan, my wife joined me. I was far enough north that it didn't take me long to accumulate the points. So in eight months, I was out of Korea and in Japan. My wife and I had a very good tour in Japan. While in Japan I was integrated into the Regular Army.

CPT Johnson: Did you ever command a company in transportation?

BG Metheny: I commanded the 594th Transportation Company in Germany. When I took command it was a 5-ton cargo, and while in command it was transferred to a 5-ton Stake and Platform (S&P). It was a fine company which turned out to be the only transportation truck company I ever commanded.

CPT Johnson: What year was that, sir?

BG Metheny: That was '59 to '60. And then I became battalion S-3.

CPT Johnson: We can go ahead and begin to address these questions. If you can, describe the area of operations as you recall. Between July 1968 and June 1969 you commanded a truck battalion in Vietnam. Would you please describe the area of operations of your command?

BG Metheny: The battalion, when I assumed command from Clinton K. Jones, operated out of Long Binh, Vietnam. It operated in the III and IV Corps areas, which essentially is to say that we were operating in an area north and south of Saigon. The major area was north of Saigon, but we ran convoys into the IV Corps on a periodic basis. We made daily runs from Long Binh to Tui Hoa, Phong Loi, Phuc Bien and these areas. The battalion consisted of six companies when I assumed command. They were 5-ton cargo and 2 1/2-ton light mainly. They supported the port clearance of the new port of Cam Ranh Bay, and the port of Saigon. They also provided long-haul transportation to the divisional areas I mentioned and were used, as required, to move troops. During the period that I was in command they converted four of the companies into S&P organizations. The 5-ton truck companies were used in conjunction with a dolly to pull the S&P trailer and we called this the "monster." It turned out to be very effective for moving such items as napalm containers, light items which were of great bulk and moved very well. We put good drivers on them and the accident rate was almost nil. This was actually a very good concept. COL Frank Case, the group commander, was the person who had this concept; we tried it and it worked very well. We also supported the movement of class V (ammunition); the 11th Battalion at Chu Lai would unload the ammunition from the ships. At that time it was commanded by LTG Nathaniel Thompson, the current Inspector General (IG) of the Army. The 11th Battalion would move the ammunition up the river and we would transfer it to a barge truck transfer point and haul it to the depot. The depot would then store it and we would reload it from the ammunition supply point (ASP) and haul it north to the combat areas.

CPT Johnson: The parent unit was the 48th Transportation Group. How coordinated were the actions between your battalion and the group headquarters.

BG Metheny: The working relationship was very good with the group headquarters. There were two group commanders during the year I commanded the battalion. COL Frank Case was the first group commander, and he was a very meticulous individual. He had an effective S-3 section that worked very well. They would give us mission assignments and then pretty much just supervise to see that we got the task accomplished. The second group commander was COL Paul Swanson who was more of a delegator of authority. He did not interfere at all with the operation of the battalions and really put together a fine working group. LTC Irving Hilton commanded the 7th Battalion. We both commanded for a full year, which was an exception to policy at that particular time. It was normal to only have command tour for six months. So we were very fortunate to have commanded for the whole period of our tour in Vietnam.

CPT Johnson: It would seem to me that the six months period would barely give the battalion commander an opportunity to get to know his companies, their capabilities, and their commanders before it was time to rotate. How was that six-month command tour decision reached? Were there that many lieutenant colonels available to command battalions?

BG Metheny: I think that the decision was made at the Department of the Army (DA) level because of the high activity, people were getting tired after six months. But apparently Paul Swanson didn't think that Irv Hilton and I were too tired, so he left us in command. It was much to the chagrin of some of the other lieutenant colonels around that wanted to command.

CPT Johnson: The tour of command is now between 18 to 24 months, which is quite a contrast to a six-month tour.

BG Metheny: We had some fairly strong feelings that six months was not a real test. But it was also before the assignments to command a battalion were centralized at the DA level. The decision was being made in that time frame to centralize the selection of battalion commanders, but it had not been made yet and so this gave the local commander much more authority over who was going to be a commander. The 6th Battalion had traditionally had long commands. LTG Oren Dehaven, the Transportation Regimental Colonel designee, brought the battalion to Vietnam and commanded it for a year, then Keith Jones for a year, and then I commanded it for a year. Then the mold was broken and it got to be a six months activity. Just as I was leaving, LTG John D. Bruen, the current 21st Support Command Commander, came in and took command of the 7th Battalion that was fairly active.

CPT Johnson: Apparently, if you were assigned to the 48th Transportation Group and were able to weather the storm, success was duty-bound to follow as long as you maintained your sense of duty and accomplishment.

BG Metheny: The 48th was a good group. It had good commanders, excellent rapport with the supporting units. The battalion commanders were given mission assignments and permitted to perform those missions.

CPT Johnson: To address the operational aspect, what kind of cargo flows did you have and was there a cyclical flow of classes of supply?

BG Metheny: The units along the combat area of course used all classes of supply and moved all classes of supply forward to these units. The major tonnage was class V (ammunition) but there was also a lot of class II (clothing and tentage) and IV (fortification materials) tonnage. A very limited number of reefer vans (refrigerated vans) were in the 7th Battalion. The reefer company commander was LT Scroggins who was an excellent young officer. The major materials we moved were 105mm ammunition and we fielded 80 percent of the vehicles almost every day.

CPT Johnson: That's an exceptionally high operational readiness rating.

BG Metheny: We had good ordnance support. The ordnance group commander was COL Tom McDonald who did very well in supporting the 48th Group with ordnance.

CPT Johnson: I would like to mention other reports, for instance the Army Concept Team in Vietnam, which arrived there just after you had departed. They looked over the transportation units themselves and made some recommendations. They discussed and evaluated and said that most of the transportation units did not have organic capability to maintain as they should maintain, and that was a specifically addressed problem of theirs. Your unit seems to have done far and above whatever they had discovered.

BG Metheny: The unit that we commanded had parts problems. We had shortage of mechanics, shortage of trained mechanics., and I make a distinction between the two. Not only were there not enough people with that MOS, those that we did have were not qualified. Any definite deficiency that we had was in maintenance. In the early days, when Dehaven and Jones were there, they worked very hard and the trucks were in pretty good shape. When I took over the command, the trucks had been maintained well. These two previous commanders had established a good level of performance, and I was able to maintain that level. We worked at it hard, and one of the things that we constantly stressed was maintenance. We had organized motor stables, which is not necessarily the best way to maintain vehicles; in fact it is not a very effective way. When you've had somebody out on the road driving for 10 to 12 hours and upon return to the motor pool he must perform another two hours of maintenance on his vehicle, this is not very satisfactory. When we started having to put two drivers on each truck for protection, as a "shotgun," we had a tendency to use our maintenance personnel and it was kind of self-defeating. When you put your maintenance people on shotgun duty then they can't very well maintain your vehicles. As a result, our vehicles started going downhill.

After we got ambushed and started making our cooks and mechanics shotguns, this resulted in a very poor situation. You are trying to get your trucks out on the road, and you don't have the people to man them; this really degraded the maintenance situation. In December 1968, January, February 1969 we had some definite maintenance

problems as a direct result of the operational requirements imposed on us by the tactical situation.

CPT Johnson: You mentioned ambush, was that something that occurred after a certain period, or was it something that your unit had been experiencing sporadically all throughout the time that you were in command?

BG Metheny: I took command in late June of 68 and the first ambush of any consequence was on the 25th of August. Before August we had only experienced random shootings at the sniper level. The situation before August 25th was that you moved with an MP escort. The division that you were moving in would provide ready reaction force to respond in case of trouble. On the 25th of August it took about eight hours for the division to respond, and the unit was pinned down over that period of time. The kill zone was about a mile long and I've forgotten the exact figures, but there were several, I would guess 13 or 14 killed.

CPT Johnson: The extent of the damage, given that eight-hour period, seems rather extensive. Did the division ever tell you why they were so late in getting the ready reaction force there?

BG Metheny: The communications broke down on getting them there. The unit was trapped and was unable to respond. This was just a breakdown in communication. From that time on the division provided more support and they sent support units along with the convoys, and it was about two more months before we had another significant ambush, I would say about the 18th of December.

CPT Johnson: That would be just before the Christmas cease-fire then.

BG Metheny: Yes.

CPT Johnson: When you speak of more support from the division, was it like providing a couple of jeeps with armed guards, a dedicated gun jeep or . .

BG Metheny: No, I'm talking about having armored personnel carriers (APCs), tanks, or armored cars. We started using mounted 30-caliber machineguns on our vehicles.

CPT Johnson: You mounted 30-caliber machineguns?

BG Metheny: We mounted 30-caliber machineguns on pedestals on our jeeps in the fall of '68. We did not go into the concept of the armored trucks. We permitted the infantry to perform their mission, we didn't attempt to take the infantry's mission away from them. Most of the ambushing in 1968 was in the 25th Infantry Division's area. In May 1969 we were ambushed in the 1st Infantry Division area. I think that this is also a reflection of the 1st division's attention to the lines of communication (LOC). The LOC were being secured in the 1st Division area in a much more aggressive manner than they were being secured in the 25th Division area. This may be an unfair statement

because the 25th Division had a much longer LOC to secure and the 1st Division had a shorter, more concentrated area of communication. The LOCs in the 1st Division were essentially secured by the Regimental Commander, COL Hal Dane, who did a very good job. We were only ambushed there significantly one time and we were moving with 1st Division support. They had tanks with us and had M-100 armored vehicles. In fact the M-100 was the first vehicle that the ambush hit. I happened to be on that particular convoy. We followed the rules that were standard operating procedure (SOP). The unit that was already through the kill zone continued without returning to assist; the units that had not reached the kill zone stopped and deployed. The reason I make this point is that the convoy commander on the December ambush returned to assist in the kill zone and was killed. I have forgotten the lieutenant's name now, but he returned and what essentially happened was that more people got killed as a result of this action as opposed to following the doctrine.

CPT Johnson: You stated you were on that convoy; did you go on many convoys?

BG Metheny: I attempted to go on a convoy at least once a month. I felt that this was one of my responsibilities. I couldn't effectively evaluate what the troops were doing without experiencing the same kind of activity as they were having. I would guess that the company commanders would be out on the convoys as frequently as twice a week. That had two sides, one is that if the company commander is out on convoy, he isn't at home supervising the maintenance. He also is not looking after the other activities being carried on that are necessary to running an organization. But the rewards outweighed the disadvantages, so they would go out a couple of times a week. The battalion commanders would go out about once a month I guess, more often depending on what was going on. Paul Swanson, the group commander, would go as well. This was a part of the esprit.

CPT Johnson: I am sure it would be, knowing that our truckdrivers, while being faced with some measure of risk conducting a convoy, could look back and see not only the old man of the company but the battalion commander as well as the group commander exposed to that same risk. I'm sure that would have done a lot for esprit. Was that a program, or an idea that had generated before you got there and was just carried on?

BG Metheny: I know that LTC Dehaven did some of these things. These were things that I did just because I found that it paid rewards. I don't know what Jones did. The first convoy that I went on was down to the IV Corps area, about three weeks after I took command. It was then I found out why we were having problems going through the IV Corps area. It was because we couldn't get through the city of Saigon. After reporting our findings, we got some help from the MPs, and this made the trip much easier.

CPT Johnson: Was it in terms of so much traffic interspersing with convoys and blocking them?

BG Metheny: This was before they had the bridge across the river and all the traffic for the 25th Division also had to go through Saigon. The situation improved after June.

Then June through October the traffic patterns improved, not the tactical conditions, but the traffic patterns improved because of the engineers' construction.

CPT Johnson: In your description of the reefer company commander in the 7th Transportation Battalion, you stated he was an excellent young officer. How many of those junior officers did you have in your unit of that type? And do you think it was something they learned at the Transportation School?

BG Metheny: I would like to put this in perspective. We are talking about 1968. The hippie regime was on, it was very popular to be anti-this or anti-that. The young officers, the second lieutenants particularly, who came into the units were essentially well-motivated. Most of them saw a sense of purpose, got on with the show, and did some exceedingly fine activities. I have nothing besides praise for the majority of the young officers who came into the unit. It was popular in those days to not be neat and clean. Sometimes you had a small group of officers who would come into the battalion that had not learned personal cleanliness habits. It didn't take long to get them to learn some personal cleanliness habits. I think that, of the deficiencies that I found, it was not the dedication or what have you, it had to do with their personal cleanliness habits. And this was kind of a thing of the time. It was also a mellowing of the military establishment. This was when they changed the haircut policy, so that very possibly during that period of time I mellowed along with the junior officers. You know, this learning goes two ways.

CPT Johnson: Whenever we change a doctrine or concept, so many people are operating under the old system and the new people are operating under the new and that sometimes generates a little bit of friction. Did that happen when that policy changed?

BG Metheny: You know there's a tendency for the American society to want the military establishment to impose a standard of discipline upon their sons much higher than the parents can instill in him when the son is under their complete control and is their sole responsibility. During the period of Vietnam we had an anti-Vietnam movement in the United States. The young officers that came over were those that had gone to college, and many of them had gone to college for one reason--to stay out of the military establishment. They got out of college just in time to get picked up by the military establishment. So this was the era of the draft, the signs of the times, the junior officers were absolutely, I think, very dedicated, hard working people who could have learned better personal habits. But they essentially found a sense of purpose, a sense of dedication, and went about to do it. I had absolutely no disciplinary problems with my junior officers.

CPT Johnson: Looking at the Transportation School environment that they came out of, did any officers report to you that did not appear to be qualified, and if so, how did you remedy the deficiencies in their training?

BG Metheny: Most of the young officers came in with good troop leading skills. Their people skills were good. I think that they had a good affinity with the troops, and that's

really what you're looking for when you're looking for a young officer. You can give him the technical

skills that he needs. You can give those to him on on-the-job training (OJT) technique. It doesn't take long to pick up the technical skills that you need for a truck company. But you cannot, in a very short period of time, teach someone people skills. I think that the junior officers came to the 6th Transportation Battalion with good people skills and I think that is reflected in the high performance of that battalion. You know, it kind of feeds on itself, so as far as the junior officer is concerned, I think that the primary purpose of the Transportation School, or any of the other service schools, is to teach the junior officers good people skills. And they also should teach them good personal habits if they don't have them. My biggest complaint against the junior officers that came to my battalion is that they did not have good personal habits.

CPT Johnson: Can you expand on that? Was it just a matter of being unshaven, long-haired, or just being so operationally concerned that time for a shower was always the last thing that they had to plan for?

BG Metheny: I think that the reason that the 6th Battalion had proportionally fewer casualties than the 7th battalion was that we took time to shower, we took time to get the hair cuts, we took time to make certain the loads were tied down tight. We had a washrack to wash the trucks. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and when the Vietcong were picking out the people that they were going to shoot at, they picked out those that were not so neat and clean. And that's the reason that I really think why we really stressed that particular point with our junior officers. Maybe I was more concerned with this than was necessary, but that was one of the things.

CPT Johnson: It would seem, that given the proportionally low incident rate, your attention to detail did tell the enemy something--that perhaps these guys take better care of their equipment and given a similar piece of equipment that is less well-maintained I might be able to knock that out a little bit quicker and cause more damage.

BG Metheny: The 7th Battalion, if you'll look at the records, had about three times the casualty rate that the 6th Battalion did and they were only half the size.

CPT Johnson: Did they operate in essentially the same, in the group, in the same areas?

BG Metheny: You had 20 truck units of the 7th Battalion and the next 20 would be the 6th Battalion, then the 7th Battalion, all interspersed.

CPT Johnson: It was intermixed?

BG Metheny: But they moved essentially in 20 truck increments and we attempted to get battalion integrity with only both battalions fielding trucks on the same route every day.

CPT Johnson: I'd like to address this interspersal. Were any missions assigned to a particular company, obviously other than the reefer company? For instance, the 5-ton truck companies, were they cargo, or they were initially 5-ton cargo truck companies, is that correct?

BG Metheny: Correct.

CPT Johnson: And then they went to S&Ps just before you departed?

BG Metheny: There were some of the 2 1/2-ton truck companies that went to the S&Ps. As I remember, and I'm not real sure on this, it seems to me that the 5-ton cargo companies were left the way they were. The 2 1/2-ton equipment had been overloaded; it was old and was being replaced. In fact, we had a command maintenance inspection and they found that something like 40 out of the 55 or so trucks that were in one of the companies had cracked frames. That turned it into a 5-ton S&P Company. Doing this required training periods to train the drivers to change equipment, but it was not as big a problem as you would make it at the Transportation School.

CPT Johnson: Why?

BG Metheny: Because about one time around the motor pool, then S&P, then you were put out on convoy.

CPT Johnson: So there was intense OJT. Regarding convoys, how prevalent was the threat of ambush to convoys?

BG Metheny: The threat of ambush was always present. As I recall, there were approximately 10 definite ambush attempts, of which four were fairly major. The difference between a minor one and a major one is that if you are involved it's a major one and if you aren't involved it's a minor one.

CPT Johnson: I understand; if you can read about it, it assumed less of a significance.

BG Metheny: Even if you hear about it. See the point that I made about being neat and clean, the infantry unit had a tendency to not be as neat and clean as the people who lived in town, because they didn't have the facilities. Well, if you are running in a convoy, and the infantry, supply, and maintenance to the battalion is running with you and they get hit, it's not nearly as important as if you get hit. So this is an evaluation of a major conflict, depending on how much involved you are in that particular conflict. Yes, there was a constant and present fear of ambush at least from 25 Aug 68 until I came home. Every day that we went out, we went out prepared to be ambushed.

CPT Johnson: Was your unit affected by the Tet Offensive?

BG Metheny: No, that was before I arrived. My unit, the 6th Battalion, was affected, but it was prior to my arrival.

CPT Johnson: What support was readily available to your convoys? Were the-re other types of assistance available, and were they dedicated for different classes of cargo? If you were carrying hamburgers did you get more or less security support than if you were carrying class V or class III?

BG Metheny: No, the support was tailored to the number of trucks within the unit and they did not try to telegraph to the Vietcong what the convoy was actually carrying. It was traditional that they would give us armored vehicles to the front and back, and interspersed through the convoy; and I'm talking about both the 1st and the 25th Divisions. They provided an overhead chopper surveillance and they provided gunships on order. The Air Force was not readily available to us. They utilized the organic capabilities of the Army to protect the convoys. I know of no time that we received air support from the Air Force.

CPT Johnson: What other agencies were available? Did you have host nation support, or a MP escort?

BG Metheny: The divisions committed their MP force. There were some MPs in each of the convoys on a daily basis. -They provided gun jeeps, but they were more used for traffic control, than they were for combat support.

CPT Johnson: What was required in terms of time and resources in order to request and insure that that support was available, both from the division combat sources and their MPs?

BG Metheny: This arrangement was made at the US Army, Vietnam (USARV) level. It was not difficult, because when you operate seven days a week, every morning you can set your watch at six o'clock, when the convoy started rolling out of Long Binh heading to Tay Ninh. You had to get out at that time of the morning to get back, and if you had any difficulty at all, you couldn't get back. This was an improvement. When I first got there, we were going through Saigon to get up to Tay Ninh and you couldn't turn the convoy around in a day. In fact, the first four or five months I was there, you could not turn the convoy around because of the distance and time that was required and so the convoy had to stay at the far end overnight and they'd come back in the daytime. So, you really had some major personnel problems because the people, every other night, slept some place other than in their own barracks. We're talking about essentially sleeping in their trucks.

CPT Johnson: How much operation did you do at Tui Hoa compared to Tay Ninh?

BG Metheny: Tui Hoa was the location of the 121st Company. It was a little installation about halfway between Long Binh and Saigon.

CPT Johnson: After that December ambush, you mounted 30 caliber machineguns on your jeeps. You also began having your maintenance people and cooks serve as

shotguns. Once that started, having to use your support personnel as your shotgun drivers, did it continue that way, was that ever alleviated?

BG Metheny: The units are structured so that the Tables of Organization and Equipment (TO&Es), at that time, provided for there to be two drivers on a truck and the cooks and the mechanics were in addition thereto. I have forgotten the exact strength but it was something in the neighborhood of 150 people, of which you had 60 trucks. This meant that you had about 30 people in overhead. When you put a TO&E together that way that really looks good on paper, and it works very fine, and then somebody in their wisdom says "Okay, we're going to staff it to 90 percent." And then you constantly have people that are home on emergency leave and some in the hospital. The personnel system does not keep the unit up to TO&E strength, so that you really turn out to be understaffed to do the things that you are trying to be done. Now, there is an effective way to get around this and this is to turn all your trucks into ordnance. Then you get extra people. These are the types of trade-offs that you get people playing with if you start trying to achieve unrealistic results. That's essentially what I have to say about the staffing of the units. You need to be able to staff the unit so that you can get realistic results. I was at Ft Benning, GA, with the cargo truck tank, and some of these other things; you use up all your assets in doing work that was outside your primary mission. The secondary mission is to fight as the infantry as required. But that is the secondary mission only when it's required. Essentially, you should attempt to identify your major mission and move in that particular arena and permit the infantry to perform their major mission.

CPT Johnson: What other weapon systems did you have in your inventory besides the 30 caliber machinegun?

BG Metheny: I know that we got in some of the light trucks that were equipped with ring-mounted adaptable to 50-caliber. This weapon is an ineffective weapon.

CPT Johnson: The 50-caliber?

BG Metheny: The 50-caliber is not an effective weapon. It was not in Korea, and it was not in Vietnam. It gives a good sense of security, but it gives absolutely no security because the weapon is not dependable, you mount it on a truck and you cannot keep the head spacing on it. The head space gets out of sync (synchronization) and about the third round that you fire out of it, you get a ruptured cartridge and that's the end of it. You spend a lot of time maintaining it, and caring for it and when you need it, it fails you. It failed in Korea and it failed in Vietnam, and I think it's ridiculous to continue to even consider that it would be a responsive weapon.

CPT Johnson: Did your soldiers have M16s or M14s?

BG Metheny: We went through a transitional period where we got rid of whatever the rifle was to get the little M16s.

CPT Johnson: Is the term "little" pejorative, or is that just a description?

BG Metheny: It was a much smaller weapon than the one it replaced. We had problems with that introduction because we were unable to really secure the weapon in the gun racks that were available at that time. Weapons security was always a continuing problem because you lived in a combat zone and you wanted the people to be able to respond, but you didn't want them to be shooting each other with their weapons either.

CPT Johnson: How did the M16 hold up? Was it easily maintained?

BG Metheny: We did not have any problems with the M16s. It functioned every time that we were ambushed, it was an effective weapon. I had no one who complained to me that their weapons were not firing. The problem that you had was making certain that the people were using the weapons after combat (weapon maintenance).

CPT Johnson: Was there a problem with everybody firing in the automatic mode?

BG Metheny: Some of the people panicked with the expense of the ammunition. But then you had an equal number of people who would not expend any ammunition.

CPT Johnson: Why?

BG Metheny: Well, you'll find that in a combat situation less than half, probably close to 25 percent, of all the people participate in the battles. The rest of the people are either not in a position to participate or do not have the inclination to participate.

CPT Johnson: That's revealing.

BG Metheny: This is not limited to Transportation units. You'll find that this is prevalent throughout all of the US forces. There was a study done on the Korean War and I think that in Korea there was something less than 20 percent of the people who really participated.

CPT Johnson: Do you think the enemy ever knew about that?

BG Metheny: Oh yes! And they more than likely have about the same percentage.

CPT Johnson: At least it was somewhat fair. Were host nation agencies available to support your convoy?

BG Metheny: No, the host nation agencies in that period of time were busily engaged in their area of assignment. And there was a host nation battalion that supported those units. There was a clean and clear distinction between the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces and the US forces and there was really not an intermixing of the two.

CPT Johnson: The process of Americanization (Vietnamization) hadn't started yet?

BG Metheny: Oh yes. This was a sister battalion that was the 34th ARVN Truck Battalion, and the battalion commander had been the battalion commander for something like nine years, so he knew what was going on. But, in this particular arena the ARVN had divisions that that battalion supported and the US forces had divisions that I supported.

CPT Johnson: You said that initially the problem with the turnaround time was that if you sent a convoy, say out of Long Binh up to the division area, that by the time they got there it was so late that they had to wait for the next day for a turnaround time. That implies that it was much safer traveling in the daytime than at night.

BG Metheny: We did not travel at night. For whatever reason, I know that prior to my arrival when the units first went over that they had night convoys. I do not ever remember operating outside of the Long Binh area at night. The ASP operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week. But this was kind of in a containment area, for lack of a better word. In a secured area. If you wanted to go from Long Binh to Saigon after dark, they formed you into a convoy and the MPs would escort you through the area.

CPT Johnson: What battles or campaigns did your battalion directly support?

BG Metheny: We continually supported the activity that the 1st Division, the 25th Division, and the 9th Division did. I was there for three different campaigns as I remember on that particular assignment, I've forgotten their names, they’re in the history books (Vietnam Counteroffensive Phase IV, Phase V, Phase VI).

CPT Johnson: Were the combat transportation assets included in on the planning stages? For instance, at a planning session for one of these campaigns, do you know if a transportation group was invited to attend, or were they just given marching orders and instructions, "This is where I need you to support"? Was there ever any two-way communication from the supporting to the supported forces that we are going to need you?

BG Metheny: Yes, this was particularly true with 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR). We supported on this, but most of the planning was done at either Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MAC-V) or USARV level. The logistic elements were represented in those planning sessions. Not necessarily the battalion or group assets, but the people whose primary mission was to do logistics planning were included in those. I felt that communications between USARV headquarters down to the battalion was excellent. LTC Jack Sprague was an excellent transportation officer at USARV. He made it a point to make certain that the Saigon Support Command, which was the support command that we worked for, was well-informed. The Saigon Support Command made certain that the group was well-informed, and the group made certain that we were well-informed. We moved units as required, and we always had adequate notice. I find absolutely no problem with the planning and the execution of the

movement of troops and I think that Jack Sprague did an outstanding job, as well as Jim Gunn, USARV's Chief of Logistics. USARV. I thought all these people did an excellent job; I find no real criticism of them. Art Hero, Commanding General of the Saigon Support Command, came down and spent a lot of time talking to the soldiers and giving a lot of troop-leading steps. Art Hero did a good job as well, and a lot of troop-leading techniques could be learned from him. The Chief of Staff, John Murray, who was a Colonel, came down and spent a lot of time. As far as I'm concerned, the troop-leading techniques exercised by Art Hero, John Murray, and Paul Swanson were excellent troop-leading techniques for the junior officers. It made the job easier because the junior officers were aware that the senior officers were concerned about them. And more importantly, the troops knew that the senior officers were concerned about them.

CPT Johnson: What was the road area network like in your areas of operation? Was it mostly paved?

BG Metheny: Within the first 20 miles around the battalion area it was paved and after you left the 20 miles you got into the gravel roads. This was satisfactory for about nine months out of the year. During the monsoon season this was not as good a road as possible, but it was good enough that we should have had mainly medium trucks. The S&Ps should have been the primary piece of equipment for the group and not the cargo trucks. The cargo trucks unnecessarily exposed people to combat conditions; they required greater staffing, greater ordnance support, greater fuel oil, not only in Vietnam, but also in Korea. We didn't have any S&P units in Korea, but we could have operated S&P units had we had them. I believe that it was a waste of national resources to outfit transportation companies with light vehicles.

CPT Johnson: About the road networks, were mines ever a problem in the operational areas?

BG Metheny: We had some mining problems down in the IV Corps. As I remember, we lost two or three trucks to mines in the IV Corps area. In the III Corps area I do not believe we had any mining problems. This was more than likely because the Vietcong were using the same roads.

CPT Johnson: What measures did your people use to protect themselves? Did they sandbag their vehicles?

BG Metheny: Mines were not an area that we were concerned about and we did not sandbag our vehicles. Later, when I was back commanding a group we did do some sandbagging.

CPT Johnson: What type of maintenance program did the battalion establish? Did you have an effective Battalion Maintenance Officer (BMO), assigned?

BG Metheny: We had a Battalion Maintenance Officer and he was fairly effective. We did a few things. We ran a maintenance school for the maintenance people on about a

quarterly cycle. We would get all the trucks and bring the people in for training classes for a couple of hours, for a week at a time. We would have about a ten-hour training session and really talk to the people. Our prescribed load lists (PLL), were those things that were developed based upon our usage factor. That was an area in which there was not a good understanding of how the system worked. As a result, until the mechanic really understood how the system worked, they weren't getting the spare parts that were available. There was another problem, they were just getting started in the computer system at that time, and they were using a punch card activity. You would get a punch card and write in whatever you wanted, and take it to ordnance. And then the ordnance people had hired the Vietnamese to keypunch this information in and they would put it into the computer and it would come back again. One of the problems that was found at the end of the day was if there were any cards left over that hadn't been keypunched, the little Vietnamese would just throw them in the waste can, and so you sometimes lost. There was continual checking. You had to make certain that you were getting back orders. This was an attention to detail that improved during the first few months that I was in the battalion. Any problems that I had when I took the battalion over was the failure of understanding of how the repair parts system worked. It was taught in the school that you get out and scrounge. That's the way people thought they were supposed to get repair parts. Well that's not the way you get spare parts. You only scrounge whenever there is a failure in the supply system. Most people figured that they would scrounge as a first method, and when that failed then they tried the supply system. They just had it back- wards. I think that the ordnance people did a good job. One of the things that was prevalent when I first got to the battalion, and I think it's correct by changing commanders in the ordnance, is that the ordnance people used the inspection techniques for admission for third echelon maintenance as a method' to keep their workload down. They would reject your vehicle. We spent too much time dragging vehicles back and forth that could not be accepted into the repair facility because they were lacking second echelon maintenance and the second echelon maintenance could not be performed because the repair parts were not available. It was kind of "which comes first?" We need to look at the methods of how you get vehicles into ordnance. There has to be a better and a clearer delineation on these particular activities. I'm not saying that the transportation units were always right and that the ordnance battalions were always wrong. I'm saying that the interface is not as good as it should be. If there was any place that there was a glitch in command control it was in this particular area. This was the area that had some real difficulty. And it turned out to be an area in which personal intervention at the battalion and group levels occurred. The commanders got involved in that particular issue. Many times, you were embarrassed, because your people let you down. It wasn't a clear cut activity. It was one in which additional maintenance people would have aided in this particular activity. And it really had to do with the age of the equipment, the necessity to use the second echelon maintenance people to ride shotgun, and the problem of diverting people from their primary mission to a secondary mission.

CPT Johnson: Did you end up having "hangar queens" or vehicles that were perennially deadlined due to lack of parts?

BG Metheny: I had the company commander to explain to *me why* a vehicle was on deadline more than three days. If it was deadlined for the third day, he would stand in front of my desk and explain to me why it wasn't in ordnance.

CPT Johnson: On those vehicles that were deadlined, if they didn't get turned into maintenance, were they ever used as parts suppliers for other vehicles? Controlled exchange?

BG Metheny: We attempted to prevent that. It was only rarely that we would get involved in that. The tendency to do that is when you don't have an effective turn-in system. if it's been sitting around too long you have a tendency to do that. I later commanded a group and the transportation truck battalion that was in that group had a company that really relied on the "hangar queen" concept. It took a month, from the time I got there, to get the 13 vehicles that were hangar queens into the ordnance. This is really a command responsibility to get them into ordnance. It starts at the driver, the platoon leader, the company commander, the battalion commander, and if necessary the group commander to get the thing into ordnance. You need to let everybody have an opportunity to perform their mission. You shouldn't deny the ordnance the privilege of working on your trucks.

CPT Johnson: That's all the questions that I have. Are there areas that perhaps you would like to address that we haven't?

BG Metheny: Yes. I would like to talk about the enlisted people. We talked about junior officers. I thought the enlisted people that came to the battalion were well-trained. They essentially brought with them a skill most Americans have; and that is how to drive a vehicle. They did not have as good schooling as I would liked for them to have in the maintenance of vehicles, but the Army has a tendency to over-maintain on the first and second echelon maintenance. If it runs don't fix it. And we have a tendency to fix it, even while it still runs. There was a tendency for a driver who doesn't want to go out on a convoy to fix his truck so it doesn't run, particularly.

I don't think that we look enough at the industry practice with their drivers. We should take some of the concepts that they use on maintenance into out trucking units. Our truck drivers have a primary mission of driving trucks and more trucks get on deadline because of a driver being requested to perform maintenance beyond his training. it is a difficulty attempting to get the driver to do a whole series of items on his truck, I think that we need to expand the maintenance capability and reduce the number of things that the driver is requested to do on his truck. In the long run, we are going to be in much better shape. I think that the driver should be able to wash it, gas it, keep it clean, make certain it gets loaded properly, secure the load, and particularly, not be requested to do a lot of the work that people have a tendency to have him do. Issue him a wrench and the only thing you are doing with that wrench is breaking the equipment. Have him check the oil, the water, the gas, the tires, and those types of things but don't ask him to do much of the maintenance. Maybe it has changed, but driver maintenance was a difficult problem.

CPT Johnson: You stated that your drivers, when they came out of Advanced Individual Training (AIT), were not as well maintenance-trained, but they did have the capability to drive. Did your units supplement the maintenance that they had to have? Did you have a dedicated program for that?

BG Metheny: Yes, we had a training program. I would like to talk to the concepts of training, I don't know what it's called now, they used to call it Continental Army Command (CONARC), I guess it's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) now. There are unrealistic training requirements placed on company commanders. They expect you to operate on a full time basis and train on a full time basis and you can't do both. The training should be tailored to the needs of the unit and the people in the headquarters in the United States (DA) are not really in a position to make those judgments. You get a large segment of training dictated, which is unrealistic in an operating environment. And I am saying that this is unrealistic in Germany. During the periods of time that I was in Germany we were operating in support of divisions, of logistics support and the drivers had the primary mission of moving cargo. We also had training programs that far exceed their time in a company area. If we want to train in the manner in which the CONARC, or TRADOC, is asking for, you might as well then hire commercial drivers to deliver your supplies, and put the people in training. You can't do both. In combat, the transportation units have a mission and you can only augment very slightly their maintenance training. If you can't augment their maintenance training, their weapons training, their security defense, their CBR (NBC), and all this with the current staffing that you have in the units. You can't field 75 to 80 percent of your trucks every day, seven days a week, and do all the training. You have to have a very limited training program, and it is very difficult to carry into a combat environment the stateside training programs. We tried to do that in Vietnam, and it was a bunch of nonsense,

CPT Johnson: Is there any other area you would like to address?

BG Metheny: No, I think that will do. Thank you very much, CPT Johnson, for this opportunity.

CPT Johnson: Sir, I want to thank you for your time.